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ABSTRACT

Presented is an interactional analysis of preschool circle time that builds on the view of classrooms as social systems within the broader culture of schooling. In the preschool studied, 18 children, 2 teachers, and several student teachers learned to use circle time together. The head teacher's approach to circle time was a developmental one, which involved the idea that children learn about language in the course of using language. Circle time was obligatory; reflected the demands of large group living; and was not a social organization which children would be likely to construct on their own in the neighborhood. Circle time was introduced to children in the school and would be an element of their experience well into the primary years. The social participation structure for conducting circle time events was uncovered with the use of Green's (1983) conversational mapping system. Findings suggested that the rules, guidelines, expectations, and roles within events changed over time. The focus of learning within events, which was evident in social action rules, shifted from the formation of the circle to the production of collaborative conversation. This shift was interpreted in terms of the children's developing competence in group conversation. Concluding remarks propose a potential peer culture dimension to circle time. (RH)

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First the Look and Then the Sound:

Creating Conversations at Circle Time*

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Running Head: CONVERSATIONS AT CIRCLE TIME

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Abstract

Becoming a student means learning to interpret and construct the multiple demands for interaction in distinctive classroom events. For an increasing number of children, the preschool provides the setting for the first encounter with these complex and dynamic classroom communicative environments. This article presents an interactional analysis of preschool circle time from an ethnographic perspective. The social participation structure for conducting these events are uncovered using Green's conversational mapping system. Findings suggest that the rules and guidelines, expectations and roles within the event change over time. The focus of learning within the event, evident in social action rules (Philips, 1972; Erickson, 1982), shifts from the formation of the circle itself to the having of collaborative conversation. This shift is interpreted in terms of the children's developing competencies for participating in group conversation. In a final section, a potential peer culture dimension to this event is proposed.

First the Look and Then the Sound:

Creating Conversations at Circle Time

The role of communication is central to the ways in which daily life and actual instruction are accomplished in classrooms (Green & Weade, 1987; Gumperz, 1986). As children become students, they necessarily become part of these complex and dynamic communicative environments. To participate successfully they need to know, predict, produce, and interpret the characteristics of distinctive classroom events in their specific classrooms (Heath, 1982; Gumperz, 1986). Ethnographers of communication in educational settings have been able to reveal for us some of these characteristics. For example, research suggests that lessons consist of simultaneous social, communicative and academic/task demands for participation (Green & Harker, 1982; Florio & Shultz, 1979). Consequently, it is not enough to "know an answer," one must also know how, and where to appropriately display it (DeStefano, Pepinsky & Sanders, 1982; Green, Weade, & Graham, in press). It follows then that students may have differential access to lesson participation depending on how well they

interpret the lesson's communicative organization (Michaels, 1986; Collins, 1983).

The preschool classroom provides an opportunity to view children as they encounter these multiple demands for participation in their first school setting (Kantor, 1988). Children three years old and younger are faced with the task of integration into a complex social organization. More loosely organized activities such as fingerpainting and storytime might seem less school-like than a math lesson. However, there are social norms and expectations which children must know in order to be successful in all of these activities. An increasing number of children are first experiencing these expectations and beginning to build competencies to meet them in preschool.

One such context for learning new roles and relationships is the large group event known variously as circle time, rug time, sharing time or first circle. While circle time is a popular activity in early childhood programs, very little research information is available to educators to help them make meaningful decisions about the content and facilitation of such events (McAfee, 1985). Can developmentally worthwhile

goals for preschool circle time be identified or should this format be eliminated from classroom curriculum?

In this paper an interactional analysis of preschool circle time is presented. The data for the analysis are part of a first study for a year long exploration of the preschool from an ethnographic perspective (Fernie, Kantor, Klein, Meyer and Elgas, in press). From this viewpoint, the "lifeworld" (Corsaro, 1986; Mishler, 1979) of preschool is considered a setting where children begin to experience and cope with the simultaneous demands of the school culture and their peer culture. Such demands are presumed to be socially constructed, as well as presented for their interpretation. As educational researchers with an ethnographic lens, we examine this lifeworld "from the perspective of the participants as reflected in their talk, actions, ways of holding each other accountable, and/or their perceptions" (Weade & Green, 1987, p. 5).

The research presented here builds on the view of classrooms as social systems within the broader culture of schooling (Erickson & Mohatt, 1983; Philips, 1972; 1982; Heath, 1982) and Corsaro's view of the preschool as a place where elements of a distinctive peer culture emerge from peer interaction within the school

(Corsaro, 1979; 1981; 1985). By taking a comprehensive look at the preschool classroom as a place where both peer and school cultures become visible, we can explore how the values, rituals, concerns, and attitudes of each culture bear influence upon and shape the other.

GROUP TIMES: A SCHOOL CULTURE FORMAT

Of the many events within a typical schoolday, large group times have captured the attention of several researchers in the sociolinguistic/ethnographic perspective. This recent research has uncovered the implicit social and conversational processes which occur simultaneously with and accomplish group events in kindergarten and first grade classrooms (Green & Harker, 1982; Dorr-Bremme, 1982; Michaels, 1986; Michaels & Cazden, 198_). The present analysis complements this body of research by examining children's experience as they learn how to participate in their first circle times--those of the preschool. In this preschool, eighteen children and their teachers interact to learn to accomplish circle time together, indeed, this is the teacher's stated goal for their circle time curriculum. Thus, as researchers we can observe children's first encounter with the school format called circle time, simultaneous with observing

the development of interactional skills needed to be one of its participants.

The basic characteristics of circle time make it a good example of school culture to examine from the "learning to go to school" perspective as well. It is obligatory (everyone must attend with the only other option to sit quietly in his cubby); it reflects the demands of large group living which make school a different place from, for example, the home (e.g., sharing space with a large number of people and sharing resources such as the teacher's attention and turns at talk); and it is not a social organization which kids would likely construct on their own in the neighborhood. Rather, it is introduced to them in school, in this case the preschool, and will be a familiar school format well into primary years.

Circle Time in A Preschool:
A Developmental Curriculum

As each school day begins, children and teachers meet on the playground for an outside playtime of about thirty minutes. Following this period of running, climbing, biking, and digging, the teacher leads her group into the classroom for the inside portion of the day. Children head for their cubbies, remove their

outer garments and eventually converge in a circular configuration on the rug. Here eighteen three and four year olds, their two teachers and several student teachers accomplish circle time. Circle time is officially led by the head teacher with other adults assuming fairly passive roles.

The following analyses of this daily school culture event are predicated on the understanding of classroom life as "patterned or routine to a great extent, as requiring the development of a joint perspective on what is occurring, as involving cooperation between and among participants, and as constructed by the participants as they work together to reach the goals established (by the teacher)" (Weade & Green. 1987, p. 8. See Cazden, 1986; Green, 1983 for a review of theoretical constructs underlying the ethnography of communication in the classroom.) In the case of this particular classroom, the teacher describes the atmosphere of the circle as essentially social, a time to recover from the exertion of the active play on the playground. Her specific curricular goal is to learn to interact as a group and to have collaborative conversation. Importantly, circle time reflects the general philosophy of the classroom

curriculum, which is to work as much as possible from the children's ideas and interests in order to encourage divergent thought and problem solving. For example, as child or adult participants request a song from the classroom repertoire, they are encouraged to create new verses, change rhythms and tempos, and to sing familiar songs in novel ways. Therefore, the teacher does not plan a topic agenda, but comes to circle as a participant and facilitator of the emergent conversation and singing. She wants the children to talk, share ideas, sing, relax, and enjoy their peers, and in doing so, to develop a group identity and the skills for creating group conversation. Thus, the teacher's approach to circle time is a developmental one: for children to learn about language in the course of using language (Wells, 1981).

This developmental agenda for circle time is important to understanding the analysis presented below. In most ethnographic/sociolinguistic studies, instructional events are seen as having co-occurring academic, social, and linguistic demands transmitted through the verbal and nonverbal messages and actions of the participants (c.f. Green & Harker, 1982). For example, as the academic content of a lesson is being

developed by its participants, expectations are also developed and signalled for appropriate social participation for the lesson. This might include appropriate ways for getting the floor, displaying an "answer," or signalling ongoing attentiveness (c.f. Bloome & Theodorou, in press). But in the preschool, the social and linguistic demands are the academic demands. Furthermore, these demands shift with the growing abilities of the preschoolers for meeting these demands. As they learn about having group conversation in school, the nature and ways of having that conversation change. Thus, as will be explicated in the analysis below, there is a reciprocal relationship between development and the "participation structure" (Erickson, 1982; Philips, 1972; 1982) for conducting the event.

Procedures

To gain the participant's perspective on the patterns of everyday life in the classroom, the researcher must, in part, engage in systematic, sustained participant observation. An "analytic whole," or the complete cycle of an event embedded in daily life, can then be located as a focus for more microanalytic work (Heath, 1982, Weade & Green, 1987).

Once the boundaries and parameters of the circle time event in this preschool were determined, twelve complete circles were chosen for analysis. More specifically, four circle times from the first two weeks of each of the three (9 week) sessions were selected. (For convenience, the sessions will be referred to as Fall, Winter, and Spring.) In addition, all circle times including the twelve events selected for analysis, were recorded on videotape. A participant observer conducted daily field work in the classroom through the entire first month of the school year, and then again for the four weeks from which the Winter and Spring circles were sampled.

The search for the analytic whole was accomplished by using a sociolinguistic approach to discourse analysis developed by Green and her colleagues (Green, 1977; Green & Harker, 1982, Green & Wallat, 1981, Green, Weade, & Graham, 1988). In this approach, a "map" or systematic chart is created from a complete transcript of the verbal and nonverbal interactions of the participants. The mapping system makes visible, among other dimensions of the event, its social organization, its content and the social action "rules" guiding social and communicative interaction.

Findings

The Subevents of Circle Time

The conversational mapping used here revealed that circle time began, not when children and teachers were seated at the circle as was originally assumed, but as soon as the children entered the classroom. As children entered the room from the playground, removed their coats at the cubbies, and gradually shifted over to the general location of circle, there was a milling around ambience created by the fact that some participants were ready before others. The teacher's remarks to the children as they entered the classroom signaled this milling time as the beginning of circle1:

> Walking down the stairs into the classroom, Joe stops at the sandtable located on the pathway to the cubbies. The teacher says, "You'll have to wait until playtime to play in the sand, Joe. Right now, its circle time. Let's go to the cubbies and put away our coats and meet in the circle."

The maps also revealed that circle time was not a singular event but rather a series of five functionally different, socially coordinated subevents, as defined by their distinctive social action rules or routine

expectations for participation (See Tables One and Two).

The second identified sub-event we call Transition Time. It began when someone, child or adult, took the first place on the rug and started to form the circle. This subevent ended when the teacher sang a routine song with the words, "Come on everybody and find a seat, it's circle time" and all remaining participants were called over to the circle. Talking and Singing Times, Subevents 3 and 4, were alternated in several cycles and made up the body of circle time. The last subevent, Dismissal was accomplished by a game-like routine. This subevent was signalled by a verbal message such as, "O.K. it's time to leave circle now, which game shall we play?" It ended when the last child and then the head teacher had left the circle area.

Insert Tables One and Two About Here

Social Action Rules: Complex Demands for Interaction

The mapping system "freezes" the actions and interactions of participants on a moment-by-moment basis. It charts exactly what occurred, with whom, for

what purpose, under what conditions, and with what outcomes. Further, it specifies the interrelationships among actions. In this fashion, the socially ordered structure for each of the five sub-events were uncovered. Specifically, it revealed the many rules a participant would need to know and use to be a successful part of its daily enactment. Figure one provides a series of examples of social rules operating within each subevent. Two such rules are detailed below to illustrate the subtlety and complexity involved in these procedures.

Rule #1: PLAY OR INTERACT NEAR CIRCLE.

During Milling Time (but not during the remaining subevents), it is acceptable to interact with materials, but only those directly bordering the circle. You will be called back if you venture across the room, for example to the easel. Thus, space is one way of defining Milling Time behavior.

Rule #2: DON'T GET TOO INVOLVED WITH MATERIALS DURING MILLING TIME

Even more subtle is the implicit rule about the extent to which you can get involved with a material during milling time. Tinkering

with the cash register at the housekeeping counter, which borders the circle, will not elicit a negative sanction. But beginning a block structure in the block corner, which also borders the circle space, will elicit, "Wait 'till playtime to build in blocks". The underlying construct across these interactions is extent of involvement. The cash register can be put away at a moment's notice to join the circle when transition time is signalled and a block structure cannot. So time involvement also constrains and defines Milling Time.

These examples demonstrate that adults and children could not learn one social action rule and apply it in all subevents: both the rule and its exact domain for application had to be understood.

Establishing Social Action: First the Look

When social action is considered on the message-by-message basis made possible through the maps, the interactional work needed to establish the rules for social action can be seen. All explicitly stated and implicitly operating social action rules, whether they are expectations, obligations, or restrictions, can be

made visible. In Tables One and Two, these social action rules are displayed by subevent, for one circle selected from each of the three sessions of the school year. These circles were determined through the fieldnotes and interviews of the teacher to be representative of the daily event, that is, nothing irregular or extraordinary occurred on these days. Table One details the procedures constructed by the group for forming, staying at, and leaving circle - that is, creating its "look." Table Two shows the group's guidelines for having conversation, including sharing turns at talk, building on one another's topic, being attentive to a speaker, etc. Put differently, these qualities made up the "sound" of collaborative conversation.

As reflected in Table Three, learning to do circle time in the preschool first involved getting the look of a circle, with the sound emerging later. Thus, the high frequency of explicit reference to rules for circle formation (e.g., claim a seat on the tape, sit in your own space) in the Fall, while concurrently, the low frequency of explicit reference to conversational rules. This focus on the look decreases in the Winter

circle and was almost entirely absent by the Spring circle.

During the first weeks of school, the teacher was required to verbally and explicitly state these rules for the circle formation. This accounted for most of the group maintenance work she had to do to keep the group "moving." The teacher and the children participated in an intense and almost ritualistic negotiation of seats, most prominent in the Fall but continuing to some degree through the year, as is illustrated in the following example:

Sean: Ginnie took my place.

Ginnie: I what?

Teacher: What?

Sean: Ginnie..

Teacher: Sea was sitting there and now he's very disappointed. He's asking you to move over. Maybe you can sit next to each other at second circle.

Adlai: Rachel, Rachel, Rachel (Teacher's name).

Ginnie: You can sit in my lap now (to Adlai).

Teacher: Oh guys, that won't work out. We tried that (sitting on each other's laps) and it doesn't work out too well.

Jim: Who's that? [pointing to another teacher]

Teacher: Because it's hard for you to be part of our circle when you're sitting on each other laps.

Jim: Who's that? [still pointing]

Teacher: Donna.

Teacher: Let me move the calendar so you're not squished.

(sings) Come on everybody and find a seat, find a seat. It's circle time.

By contrast, the opposite pattern was true for the subevents for talking and singing reflected in Table Three. The group's focus on rules related to social action for conversation, minimal in the Fall, increased greatly in the Winter and Spring, just as the look focus diminished.

The Development of Group Conversation: Then the Sound

Learning to have real group, i.e., collaborative conversation, turns out to be a gradual developmental process accomplished by the teacher and the children conjointly over the year. Shifts in both the participation structure for having conversation and in the focus of learning rules make sense when the changing nature of conversation over time is considered. Gradually, conversation became more complex and interactional rules reflected this development. For example, the actual number of rules guiding the construction of conversation at the circle increased, from 14 in the Fall, to 26 in the Winter and to 29 in the Springtime (See Table Four). Table Four displays all analyses of the 12 circles which summarizes the group learning that occurred over the year. These analyses are detailed in the following two sections of the article.

Insert Table Four About Here

The Central Role of the Teacher in Creating Conversation. Early on, the teacher played the central role in creating and maintaining conversation. Fall

conversations, on close examination were not group like at all; they were dyadic. As shown in Table Four, the flow of conversation was back and forth between the teacher and individual children. In addition, there were some exchanges from the teacher to the group collectively, but there were no public exchanges between child participants around the circle.2 Over time, the direction of conversation became more diverse; by the Spring circles, the talk around the circle had become multidirectional and more group-like.

In similar fashion, the group's initial dependence on the teacher for introduction of the topic lessened over time as children introduced more and more topics (See Table Four). This increasing child-centeredness is reflected further as the proportion of overall talk shifts from dominance by the teacher in the Fall, to dominance by children in the Spring.

The central role of the teacher in the early days of circle time was further reflected in the children's strategies for "getting the floor." (See Table Five). It was the teacher's attention as opposed to the group's attention that the children initially wanted. Thus, early strategies for securing the teacher's attention (days one through ten) included: getting up

to stand in front of the teacher, turning her face toward their own, tapping her shoulder, leaning into her proximal space, or calling her name. Her importance to the children can be seen in negotiations for her lap:

Ellie: Can I sit on your lap?

Teacher: I was going to ask someone I haven't sat with yet. You and I already had a turn.

Teacher: But maybe you and I could sit together at second circle.

Stephany: Can I sit on your lap?

Teacher: Well, Stephany, I'm going to tell you the same thing. I think maybe we should have a lap chart like we used last year.

Sarah: You think so.

Teacher: Well, it would be a fair way to remember.

Sarah: We can share.

Teacher; We can share, that's true.

Sarah: I could sit on your knee.

Teacher: Well, it doesn't feel too good to have someone sit on my lap and my knee. May you could sit next to me.

Insert Table Five About Here

The teacher's overall role in establishing the social action rules for circle time was clear. For example, the teacher encouraged participants to build on each other's topics by ignoring claims which were off-topic and acknowledging those which were related in some way to what the group was talking about. The effect of her negative sanction (ignoring) can be seen in the greatly increased number of on-topic remarks made by the children in the Spring circle in Table Three.

Similarly, the teacher shaped the rules for getting the floor. During the first days of conversation, the teacher consistently denied a speaking turn to anyone who tried to obtain one by standing in front of her (implicit rule: you must be seated to participate). And the children caught on quickly: after day six, this strategy was almost never

tried again. However, children could secure the floor by merely claiming it (c.f., Dorr-Bremme, 1982, p. 148) that is, they spoke out with a statement, question, or answer to the teacher's open question to the group. Because the competition for a turn at talk was not great during these early Fall circles, waiting for a pause in the stream of talk and grabbing the floor worked well. In all, there were 115 child initiated conversational turns over 4 circle events: 33 were secured after a physical strategy, 74 were claimed and 8 were bid for by using a strategy to first secure the teacher's attention such as "teacher, teacher." (See Table Five) This last type of bid was a foreshadow of a social action rule which became more important and elaborated in the participation structure for Winter circle times. In the next section, this and other changes in the ways of conducting circle time will be examined and interpreted.

Shifts in Participation Structure: the Children's Expanding Role. Over time the children started to have more to say and overall, more talk was accomplished at each circle. In fact, by the Winter taping, there was an increase in talk of 140 percent over Fall circles. There was no set amount of time for circle - when

ordering turns became unmanageable, the teacher initiated a song - when it became apparent that attention for both singing and talking had "run out", the teacher initiated the dismissal routine. Thus, as conversations became more productive, circle time took longer.

But more significant than the change in quantity of talk was the change in the participation structure for accomplishing these more productive circle times. With the emergence of more child initiated talk, competition for the floor became an interactional issue and the participation structure had to be renegotiated. Much of the teacher's group maintenance work became devoted to explicit talk about the social rules for sharing the floor. Some of the new rules and procedures were delivered directly by the teacher as in the following example:

Teacher: You know what? I know you are really interested in having us hear your idea. But remember yesterday when we talked about once you give an idea you have to be patient and let other children given an idea. I

think it's your turn to wait a few minutes. OK? Let's hear from Adlai, he had an idea.

On the other hand, some of the changes in implicit rules were established by the children themselves. For example, strategies for getting the floor were changed dramatically by the children as competition for the floor increased with an increase in talk. Children began to bid for an official turn at the floor by using the conversational device foreshadowed in the Fall--they used phrases which serve to capture someone's attention: "I know..."; "I have an idea...!"; "You know what...!". The increased use and development of this strategy was not entirely gratuitous. It was role modelled by the teacher, who frequently used this device herself, for getting the children's attention ("Hey everybody guess what!" or "I have something important to tell you."). Thus, what counts as effective strategy in this classroom's circle time is context-bound and part of the shared knowledge between members of the event; this notion that communicative conventions are always context-bound is well known to ethnographers of communication (Gumperz, 1986).

The resolution of who got the floor amid intense bidding had been renegotiated again by the time of the Spring taping when talk increased again to an average of 153 turns per circle or an increase of 45 percent over Winter circles (See Table Four). A system for distributing official turns at having the floor was developed by the teacher which used language in an explicit way to negotiate turns.

Teacher: O.K., Wait...too many people are talking at once. We can't hear anybody. Let's give Stephany a turn and then Mike and then June.

Laura: And then I want a turn.

Jess: And then me.

John: And me.

Adlai: And I want a turn too.

Teacher: O.K. Let's also give Laura, Jess and John a turn. We'll hear as many turns as you want but lets take them one at a time.

In this system, only the person with the acknowledged turn at the floor had the right to

establish a topic. Other participants could chime in with an on-topic remark. Any attempts to change the topic by claiming the official floor (which worked previously) was met by teacher resistance, "We're listening to Sean now."

In sum, in the preschool classroom, students and teachers conducted a truly social occasion with the school agenda of learning about language in the course of using language. Over time, the group learned this preschool's language of circle time. Here it is the language of collaborative conservation: having and making choices about what to talk about; getting and keeping the floor; having and expressing ideas; building on one another's topics; sharing turns at talk, etc.

The ongoing interactional work that established, sustained and facilitated the daily circle event was largely explicit and delivered by the teacher. Over time, the essence of this learning shifted from the formation of the circle itself, to the having of conversation. The children's ability to have group conversation grew over time and caused "shifts" in the group's ways of conducting conversation, i.e., the participation structure for the event. As conversation

became more complex and more social, children created new strategies for getting a turn at the floor while the teacher introduced her own mediating procedures for sharing the floor. In this sense, the nature of the classroom event was conjointly created throughout the year with a shift in primary activity and influence from teacher to children.

GROUP TIMES: A PEER CULTURE EVENT?

As this investigation began, the author's theoretical assumption was that circle time was an important, but purely school culture event. However, out of our yearlong study, the view of preschool events as having peer culture as well as school culture dimensions has emerged. As eighteen children sit around the circle, there certainly is a feeling of social excitement among peers, the largest assembled group of his peers a three or four year old is likely to have encountered. And indeed, in this particular classroom with its emphasis on natural conversation, circle time is truly a setting for social exchange among children.

Consider the content of talk at this circle time--the topics are largely chosen by the children. Naturally, these topics center around the interests and

values of the peer culture: superheroes such as family anecdotes, issues of size and age, toys from home, superheroes such as Voltron and He-Man, and scripts from television shows. Circle time is a context with many embedded opportunities for children to build shared experience and to construct a shared reality as a peer culture in the classroom.

With the introduction and development of such topics, circle time becomes a vehicle to inform the local peer culture and perhaps to inform individual children who might lack socio-cultural information Meyer, 1987 and Elgas, 1987). Children vary in their access to such cultural information. They may be restricted by well meaning parents from the television fare related to superheroes; or, they may be children raised without siblings by older parents in a childless neighborhood. For these children, the information about their peer's concerns and interests, learned at circle time, may enable them to enter and participate in peer culture activities.

It is also possible that circle time may serve the local peer culture in more tacit and covert ways. For example, as friendships form in the classroom, children negotiate seats next to their friends and choose each

other during dismissal games--uses of circle time to support friendship and affiliation. More covertly, status in the peer culture can be gained by non-participation or by leading the group in a refusal to comply with a demand made by the teacher. As the teacher is requesting an "inside voice" from a particular child, the other children may giggle and encourage the rebellious behavior of their friend.

CONCLUSION:

Can developmentally worthwhile goals for circle time be identified? The learning of group conversation demonstrated in this classroom seems good reason to value circle time -- it fits nicely with Kohlberg's call for development as the aim of education (Kohlberg, 1969). The research perspective used here revealed the social action rules conjointly generated, sustained and modified at circle time, as group members interacted and interpreted each other's actions on a day to day basis across the school year. This analysis explicates the growth and change in the language patterns used by child participants around the circle. As the group became more able to conduct group conversation, the ways of orchestrating and negotiating such conversation became transformed. Put differently,

the learning of group conversational skills caused shifts in the participation structure for the event.

Classroom learning events are social accomplishments: becoming a student means developing the interactional competencies needed to take part in these events. The preschool classroom presents contexts for learning and interaction which are brand new to children. A large group event among twenty people known as circle time is just such a context. Circle time is therefore a useful heuristic vehicle to examine children's first encounters with learning the language of schooling. What makes circle time distinctive as an event in this classroom is both its first time status and its unique requirements; what makes the preschooler distinctive as a participant is the fact that this is his first school, experienced importantly during the active years for language acquisition and the development of communicative competence.

Above all, while these analyses uncovered much of the complexity of this school event, it is primarily a layer of reality as seen through the lens of the school culture. In keeping with the proposed emergent view of classrooms as a participation structure configured by

peer and school cultures (Fernie et. al, in press), further analysis is warranted. This double lens could provide an even fuller portrait of children's experience in this event.

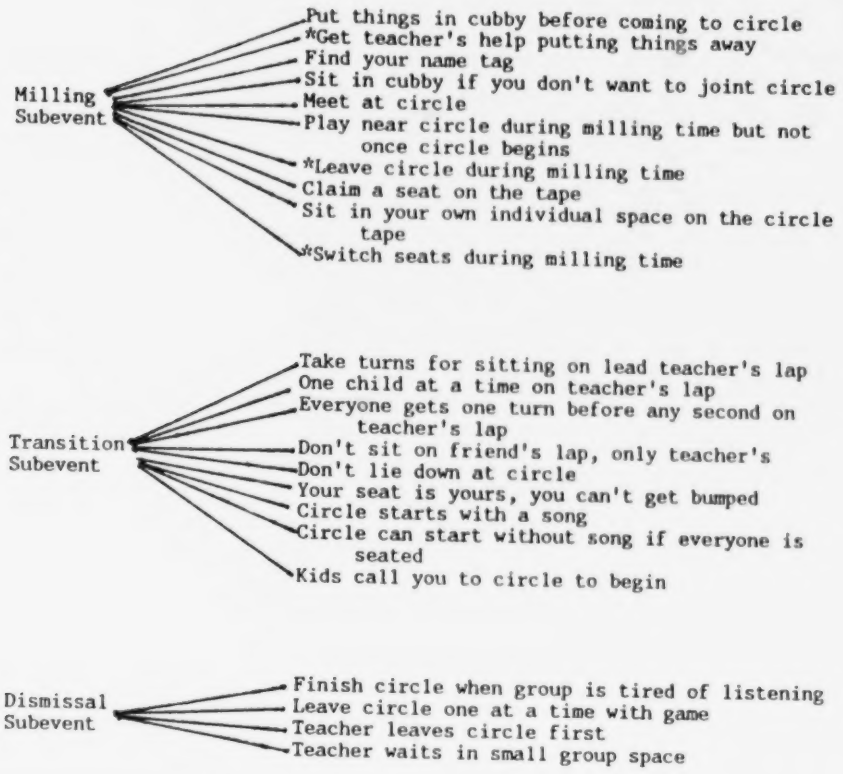
Footnotes

1. This and all other examples of classroom interaction are fieldnotes from the research project reported in this article.

2. Of course there were private side conversations between them which were always interrupted by the teacher. She would ask these children to wait until later to have their conversation and to be part of what the group was talking about.

Table 1

Social Action Rules Guiding Participation in Three Subevents: Milling Time, Transition, Dismissal


Milling Subevent
Put things in cubby before coming to circle
*Get teacher's help putting things away
Find your name tag
Sit in cubby if you don't want to joint circle
Meet at circle
Play near circle during milling time but not once circle begins
*Leave circle during milling time
Claim a seat on the tape
Sit in your own individual space on the circle tape
*Switch seats during milling time
Transition Subevent
Take turns for sitting on lead teacher's lap
One child at a time on teacher's lap
Everyone gets one turn before any second on teacher's lap
Don't sit on friend's lap, only teacher's
Don't lie down at circle
Your seat is yours, you can't get bumped
Circle starts with a song
Circle can start without song if everyone is seated
Kids call you to circle to begin
Dismissal Subevent
Finish circle when group is tired of listening
Leave circle one at a time with game
Teacher leaves circle first
Teacher waits in small group space

[a]Optional rules are indicated by an asterisk; all other rules are obligatory.

Table 2. Social Action Rules Guiding Participation in Two Subevents: Talking and Singing Times

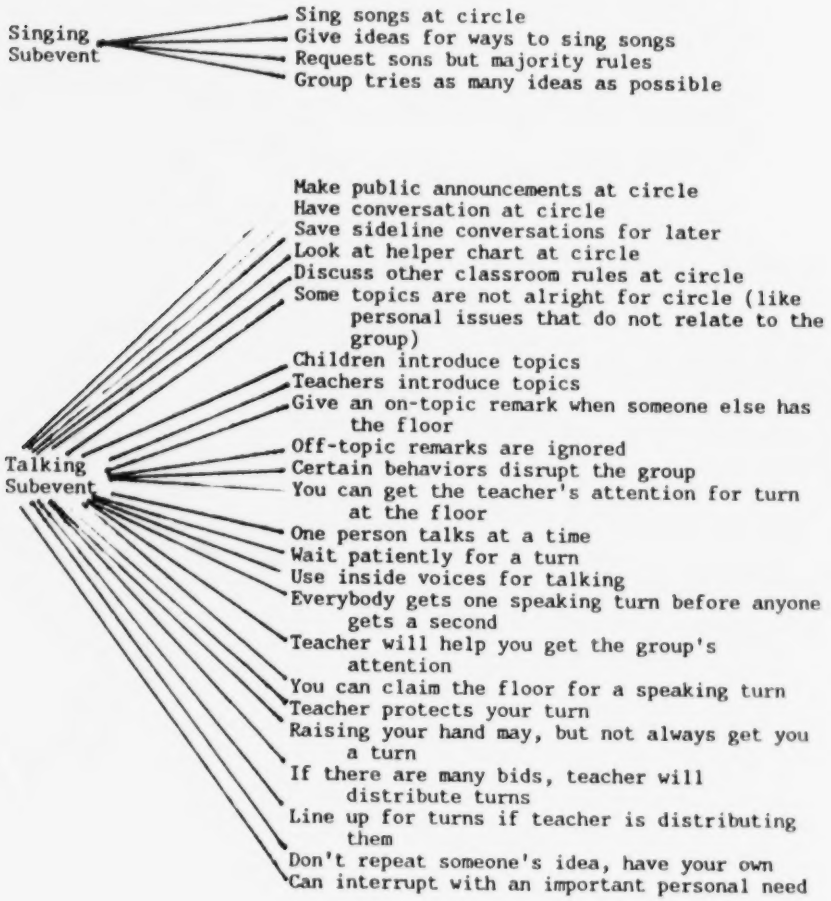

Singing Subevent
Sing songs at circle
Give ideas for ways to sing songs
Request sons but majority rules
Group tries as many ideas as possible
Talking Subevent
Make public announcements at circle
Have conversation at circle
Save sideline conversations for later
Look at helper chart at circle
Discuss other classroom rules at circle
Some topics are not alright for circle (like personal issues that do not relate to the group)
Children introduce topics
Teachers introduce topics
Give an on-topic remark when someone else has the floor
Off-topic remarks are ignored
Certain behaviors disrupt the group
You can get the teacher's attention for turn at the floor
One person talks at a time
Wait patiently for a turn
Use inside voices for talking
Everybody gets one speaking turn before anyone gets a second
Teacher will help you get the group's attention
You can claim the floor for a speaking turn
Teacher protects your turn
Raising your hand may, but not always get you a turn
If there are many bids, teacher will distribute turns
Line up for turns if teacher is distributing them
Don't repeat someone's idea, have your own
Can interrupt with an important personal need

Table 3

Explicitly Stated and Implicitly Operating Social Action Rules Guiding Participation Over the Year

Subevent	Fall		Winter		Spring	
	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit
Milling	23	11	8	15	0	8
Transition	10	7	9	2	0	8
Dismissal	0	4	1	3	2	3
Total	33	22	18	20	2	19
Singing	0	7	0	20	0	3
Talking	5	35	46	85	28	116
Total	5	42	46	105	28	119

Table 4

Development of Conversation at the Preschool Circle Over 12 Events

	Fall	Winter	Spring
Direction of conversational exchange in average number of turns per circle over 12 circles			
Teacher ↔ Child	30	89	63
Teacher ↔ Group	14	16	16
Child ↔ Group	--	1	3
Child ↔ Child	--	--	16
Group ↔ Child	--	--	2
Group ↔ Teacher	--	--	1
Introduction of topic, total # over 12 circles	8T 3C	12T 12C	8T 30C
Percent overall teacher-child talk by turns per circle	63%T 37%C	51%T 49%C	45%T 55%C
Average number conversational turns per circle	44	106	153
Number of on-topic to off-topic remarks by children in a single circle	6 on 0 off	5 on 19 off	45 on 14 off

Table 5

Child Strategies for Floor-Taking (Total number over 12 circles)

	Fall	Winter	Spring
Physical strategies (i.e., getting out of seat to tap)	11	0	0
Claims (speaking out with statement, questions, etc.)	52	82	133
Attention devices ("Hey! Guess what!")	2	50	54
Distributed by teacher ("first Rachel then Sean")	0	14	38

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